

FEMALE DEITIES WORSHIPPED BY KOLS

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are made, the animal should be of a black colour. Black glass bangles will also be attached to her part of the shrine or found where she is worshipped. She likes the Tulasi plant and sometimes lives in it. [822]

Occasionally she is a household goddess and is worshipped along with other household deities. [824]

When the spirit of Kali possesses a worshipper, he can walk without discomfort or injury on spiked sandals. [292]

Kalka. Is one of Sharda's six sisters. She is seldom invoked, for according to Kols, when Shardamai or Kalimai are worshipped she is happy and pleased.

Khermai. This *devi* is probably the one most frequently worshipped by Kols. The Census Report classes her as the Earth Goddess¹ and Crooke² believes Khera to be the same as Khetrpai, the field guardian. Sometimes it would appear that the term included many kinds of deities such as Kali and Sitalamai. Her shrine is found in or near every Kol village, and she is always mentioned; it is also frequently claimed that she must be considered first, subsequently any others that one might choose. Sometimes she is called Bhagavati and is said to be the best mediator between men and Bhagawan, for if she is kept pleased and contented, one does not have to worry about Bhagawan.

Khermai's duties are manifold. She is the village watchman and protector. She wards off evil spirits and prevents their entry into the village. Sometimes her shrine is placed at the south of the village to ward off the evil spirits which so frequently come from that direction. In times of illness, she is invoked, and is thought to be intimately connected with disease; when one has smallpox she is worshipped in the person who is stricken. Cholera and smallpox are sometimes said to come directly from Bhagawan, and she is the best protector in case he sends them. On such occasions she should be given a libation of water and the village may be "tied" with her help. [778] [753]

She is thought to help the Kols in all kinds of difficulties; she guards a man going on a journey; as he leaves, he may promise her an offering of a coconut which he will give if he returns safely. At set times she possesses her devotees, and through them reveals her will and answers their questions on problems confronting them. The sure test of her presence is the power to thrust an iron trident through the tongue or cheek. [484] [785]

1 See pp. 148, 180.

2 *Census of India, 1911*. X:1, p. 98.

3 Crooke, W., *Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, pp. 92, 93.

4 See Chapter IX, Tying the Village.

776 worship. No image is found, but there are exceptions. In Rewa State
778 it was said that she should be worshipped at least twice a year: two
782 days before the *Dasara* festival (September-October) and eight days after
Chaita (March-April).

[184] While animal sacrifices are forbidden at the Maihar temple, they
may still be offered at the village shrine.¹ One group said that a black
kid was the only acceptable offering, while from others it was learned
[187] that chickens, lambs and suckling pigs may all be sacrificed. The usual
vegetable offerings are likewise acceptable. She frequently possesses
people and speaks through them.

[842] Childless women, especially, should worship her and make offerings
and sacrifices, so that she may speak to them through the *panda* and tell
them what to do before they can expect children. Shardamai is therefore
[755] revered at this place by childless women. It is also claimed that she
can restore sight and cause the blind to walk and is a general miracle
worker.

776 During *Chaita*, the Hindu month corresponding to parts of March
● 785 and April of the Christian calendar, there should be an evening fast
to Shardamai covering nine days. Regular food may be taken only in the
[805] morning, and the evening meal should be limited to water, milk and
water-nuts called *singhara* the Water-caltron (*Trapa bispinosa* or *natans*).
[262] On the ninth day the big offering to Shardamai must be made. Before
anyone may partake of the meal on the ninth evening, a coconut² must
[782] first be broken before the village shrine and offered to her, and then
the edible part distributed to those present. Thereafter regular meals
may be taken. If possible someone from the village, or better yet
several from the chief families should go to Maihar to worship. Their
worship at Shardamai's temple and the worship at home will reinforce
the bond of friendship which they must maintain.

776 *Shivari* or *Sheori*. *Shivari* is called the mother of all Kols and served
Rama during his exile and search for Sita and has thus become deified.
Shivari is nearly always listed by Kols, nevertheless actual worship
[778] of her is rare; but Kols talk of her temple somewhere in Rewa and
also at *Sheori-Narayan* near Raipur, eastern Central Provinces.
Stories concerning her are found in connection with the study of the
origin of the Kols and in the chapter on legends.³ She probably
represents a tribal goddess.

[753] *Sitalamai*. This name is a euphemistic title meaning the cool,
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¹ Kali worship is associated with animal sacrifice and *Shardamai* is probably
equivalent to *Durga* in Hinduism.

² Probably a relic of human sacrifice.

³ See pp. 8-10; also Chapter X.

793 *The Selection of the Panda.* One old *panda* described to us how
787 his son had been selected to be his successor and had even begun to
assume some of the duties before the father had to give them up.
When the old man wanted to know who would be his successor, he
went with his son to the village shrine, and they prostrated themselves
on the plastered courtyard before the *devi*. It was at *Jawara* time,
when the *devis* are most active, and he told the *devi* (Khermai in this
case) that he had a request to make of her; would she hear? He
waited until he felt, by strange movings of his hair that she was present
and listening, and then asked if she would have his son for her *panda*.
He says that he became unconscious, and while in that state Khermai
spoke through him to the people present to say that she was willing
to have his son as her priest. When he came out of his trance he found
that his son was also possessed of Khermai and that he was shaking
and shivering and uttering the strange cries which are characteristic of
one so enchanted. This was, he says, the confirmation of the *devi's*
willingness to have him, and she had even then possessed him. From
now on the son could not be considered as merely an assistant, for he
was a *panda* who would soon take over all the work of the shrine.
We did not see the son, who at the moment was working in the Cement
factory at Kymore, digging up stone. But since that first time, the
son had often been possessed of the *devi*, and on each occasion he had
named the *devi* commanding him at that moment. He makes regular
offerings to the *devis*.

[787] If the *panda* has no sons, the selection is from a group of likely
young men, or the community may simply join up with another
village. A few weeks after the *panda's* death, the village elders
gather in the evening at the shrine and begin to play the drum and
sing songs of the *bhagat* type. As the evening wears on and the insis-
tent throbbing of the drums becomes more strident, an emotional
excitement spreads over some of them. It may centre on one of the
players, or on another who is singing, or yet on another seated there.
This is a manifestation of the presence of the *devi*, and those who feel
the *bava* coming upon them should go before the village shrine. It
793 may be that one of those present is particularly affected; he may
787 shout, scream, beat himself upon the ground, lash himself with a barbed
785 iron lash to be found at the shrine, or he may put on the spiked sandals
and jump about. Whoever thus shows that he is supremely possessed
is marked out as the successor of the deceased *panda*.

If, however, the interested onlookers cannot agree that it is
genuine, and if there should be more than one candidate in that state,
there will have to be even more extreme tests. One of these is to thrust

THE VILLAGE SHRINE

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the point of an iron trident through the cheek or tongue or part of the skin of the neck, and ask the "candidate" to jump and run about with it in place. This is the final test, as it were, of the validity of the claim to be a Kol priest. Further on is a fuller description of the phenomenon of the *bawa*.¹

Duties of the Priest. The duties of the priest are largely connected with the village shrine. He should keep it in order, offer the cocoanuts and animals, and perform the *hom* sacrifice. He is also the mouthpiece of the goddess. When possessed of the *devi* he is asked questions, and the answers that come from his mouth are not his, but are claimed to be the answers of the *devi* herself.

It is not infrequent that the *panda* is also expected to perform certain magical practices, although he is not as expert in these as the Baiga priest is believed to be. These practices are usually in connection with disease, but it may be any form of divination known to Kols. A child is ill, and the priest is asked for his help in healing the disease. The priest will go before the *devi* and vow to take no food for nine days, and after that to make a *jawara* offering. An earthen *ghara*, wheat and milk are given him. These he takes to the child's house and plants the wheat in the *ghara*. Sometimes this is done in his own house. The wheat is sprinkled daily with water and a little milk. It sprouts and grows, and in nine days, after being taken with ceremony to the village tank or a near-by stream, the earth is washed away. The wheat plants and the roots are then brought back to the house where the child is ill. If by this time the spirit causing the illness has not been satisfied, the wheat stalks and roots will surely satisfy her if left on the roof to dry. Like the stalks, the disease will dry up and disappear.

THE VILLAGE SHRINE. It was noted that each village has its central shrine. This, however, is not the only shrine in the village; there may also be other ones, but there is one which is recognized as the chief place of worship, and it is about this central shrine that the chief religious observances centre. The place of worship is a sanctuary of a god or goddess and not the place of public congregational worship. The pictures on plate xxiv show village shrines, and a ground plan in figure 26 is also given to show the disposition and arrangement of the various concomitants. Some shrines have more in them than others, and frequently a red *sendar* mark and cocoanut shells and ashes are the only sign that worship is carried on there. Hindu influences may be presumed.

¹ See p. 188.

778 are very common. The trident with the sharp point is used at the
411 time the *panda* or another is possessed of Khermai, and is pierced
785 through the tongue or cheek.

787 3. *Spiked Sandals (Kharau)*. Every well-equipped shrine should
778 have at least one pair of spiked sandals. These are made of pieces of
787 wood in the shape of the sole of a shoe with sharp spikes driven through
292 so that the person walking on them stands on the points. There is a
wooden peg toward the front of each which fits between the big toe
and the next and holds the sandal on the foot. These are generally
used at the time of the trance. When the spirit of Kalimai possesses
a man, it will be evidenced by his desire to put on these sandals and
jump about in them.

779 4. *Iron Tongues (Chimla)*. There is also another kind of iron
785 instrument found in these shrines: iron tongues used for taking coals
787 out of the fire. When Sannyasi *deo* comes upon a man he will take
412 the tongues and beat himself with them. Hindu ascetics usually carry
tonga.

5. *Iron Lash (Gurda)*. This is a sort of magic chain made of
iron links barbed with bits of steel. The handle by which it is grasped
is also iron. During the *bawa*, if one is possessed (particularly by
Bhuiyan *deo*), he will pick up this chain and lash himself till the blood
comes. If some person, possessed of an evil spirit, is brought before
the shrine, and the *panda* in his trance recognizes the reality of the
spirit possession, he will attempt to cast out the spirit by lashing the
unfortunate man.

6. *Iron Nails*. Some bits of iron or iron nails are usually found
somewhere about the shrine. These serve a dual purpose: they are
tests for Khermai, and one possessed of her can stick them into his
flesh without pain or discomfort. They are also used to frighten away
evil spirits who may make a disturbance, and are sometimes flung in
their direction causing them to fly away.

7. *A Bed of Spikes (Palná)*. Often a bed of spikes is found in
connection with these shrines. This too is to test spirit possession.
778 One possessed of Kali will seek to use the bed of spikes.

777 8. *A Ram's Horn* is sometimes found. It is lucky to have one
237 and it protects the shrine.

354 9. *Clay Lamps (Dip)*. Clay dishes into which oil is poured and
wicks attached are also found at all shrines. Sweet oil and incense
are mixed, and during the time of worship two or three of these are
lighted and kept burning. The *panda* lights and cares for them.

789 10. *Ashes (Rakha)*. A pile of ashes is always found somewhere
about the shrine. This is a good protective device against evil spirits.

787 sible to pain, and very painful things may be resorted to without any
[151] apparent sensation on his part. Some drug may be partly responsible.

There are certain tests as to whether a person is truly possessed of the *devi* or not. The following are tests Kols have given.

1. A trembling and jerking of the head and limbs.
2. A state of semi-consciousness. He is clearly not himself, but is able to recognize the people who stand about him and ask him questions.
3. The uttering of the magic words: "oohha, oohha." No meanings could be given for this, but it represents a gasping effort.¹
4. The uttering of other unintelligible words and phrases.
- 781 5. The ability to walk and jump about on spiked sandals without
785 evidence of pain or discomfort.
6. The lashing of the back with the iron lash until it is raw and bleeding.
7. The passing of the point of the trident through the tongue, cheek, or the skin of the neck and leaving it there from a half hour to two hours. During this time the person may move about, and if it is not through his tongue, may answer questions. This is said to be the supreme test. It is claimed that no sores or bleeding follow it and that it is treated by a mixture of ashes, *ghī*, *pan* and lime juice.

787 It is not held that all of these must concur to give adequate proof; and though often they do not go as far as really wounding themselves, the *bawa* is still regarded as a genuine one.

If two men, for instance, should be possessed at the same time by different *devis*, there may be a contest between those particular *devis* should there be any enmity between them. One may try to defeat the other, and the result is a fight between the men.

Kol women are also said to have the *bawa*, but with them this phenomenon is not nearly so common. It is taken as a sign that the deity is pleased with them.

During the time of the *bawa*, people come seeking guidance and help for their troubles: childless women ask what offerings they should give in order that they may bear children; domestic troubles are told and their solution asked for; illness, lack of work and the like, are all brought before the *devi*, and an answer is forthcoming.

787 Following is a description of a *bawa* seen by the author. It was
171 a Domar² *bawa*, not a Kol one, but Indians familiar with Kol *bawas*
564 said that it was not essentially different. The *bawa* was performed under abnormal circumstances: it was not done before a regular shrine, but one improvised against a telephone pole.

The assistant first cleared a spot of grass making a bare area about two feet wide and three feet long. The one who was to perform then came and poured a little water over the spot, rubbed the earth

¹ It may be connected with the name *OJHA* or "medicine man".

² [i.e., a low caste Hindu.-Analyst]

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

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occasion, as such acts are not considered really reprehensible if done during *Holi*.

Jawara. This is the most important of the festivals observed by the Kols and while linked to Hindu observances, is nevertheless probably a much more primitive affair than many Hindu ceremonies. The *Jawara* festival comes twice a year, in the Spring in the Hindu month of *Chaita* (March-April), and the Fall in the month of *Kunwar* (September-October). The former begins on the first day of the Hindu year in the month *Chaita*, and lasts for nine days ending on *Ramnavami* or the birthday of Rama. In the Fall it comes during the first nine days of *Kunwar* and ends just before *Dasara* on the tenth of *Kunwar*. The Fall festival comes just before the sowing of the winter crop of wheat, and the Spring festival comes just after it has been reaped. 796 [177]

The *Jawara* festival is entered into by the Kols with great enthusiasm, and it is during this period that the *bawa* or spirit possession is most common. During the nine days of the festival, singing, dancing and the beating of drums are kept up almost incessantly after nightfall. 787

It is called *Jawara* festival after the *juari* plant, a large millet, *Sorghum vulgare*. As this is not grown to a great extent in Central India, it is more usual to find that wheat rather than *jawar* is used in the ceremonies. On the first day of the nine days' celebration, a room or portion of a room is plastered and made ready for the sowings. A ceremonial bath should be taken first, and the one who plants the wheat should care for it the rest of the nine days. The wheat is then sown in small earthen vessels or sometimes in leaf dishes filled with earth, which is well-manured so that the wheat will grow nicely. It is watered daily and a few drops of milk are sprinkled over it in order to make it grow even better. The water should never be put on the plants directly from the hand, preferably the roots of a barley plant should be dipped into the water and thus it is sprinkled upon the growing plants. The vessels are kept indoors and probably not far from one of the household goddesses. It is said that all Kols do not sow this wheat, only those whose forefathers did so, or perhaps also those who have made some vow before a deity. 824

During the nine days of this celebration almost all the Kol deities are invoked and worshipped, and there is much singing before the village shrines, and *bawas* are common. The eighth night is the one most likely for a *bawa*, for that night all the people in the village are required to fast. During the nine days, the person caring for the wheat should fast in the evenings. The long stalks have sprung up by this time and are now ready to be taken out. 796 787 [785]

796 The ninth day is the final day of the *Jawara* festival. The
787 greenish-yellowish wheat can now be brought out and something
foretold, in the case of the Fall festival, about the coming crop. If
the wheat has grown nicely, in spite of the fact that it has been kept
indoors, and in addition frequently covered by a basket, it is a sign
that there will be a good crop of wheat. If the growth of the *jawars*
is poor, the crop will likely be a poor one. The process appears to
[787] have an element of magic in it and is used as a method to
secure good crops; for the earth is first well manured and then well
cared for and watered. Fraser in his series, "The Golden Bough", has
found a similar ritual elsewhere which he calls "The Garden of Adonis."

The growing wheat cannot be taken out before the late afternoon.
When the time comes to take it out, some animals are sacrificed at
the village shrine, there is singing and dancing and probably there will
be a *bawa* with Shardamai as the deity possessing the devotee. The
[422] procession is formed at the shrine, and the women carry the plants
on their heads to the river or tank where the stalks are immersed.
[787] The men folk follow a short distance behind and loudly beat their
[533] drums to frighten away any evil influences. The women sing songs
of the *bhagal* type and there may be some *bawas* as well, and the de-
[785] votee has a trident stuck into his tongue or cheek. Upon reaching
the place where the wheat will be "cooled", the women enter the water,
and wash away the earth from the roots of the plants. The earthen-
ware vessels are thrown away, and the stalks are retained. Most of
[431] them, though not all, are brought back and distributed to friends as
[627] a mark of goodwill. They receive from others as well as give. All
enmities should be healed.

796 That evening there is a feast at the village shrine. The Kols
gather by *kurhis* and the animals sacrificed are eaten along
574 with other foods; there is more music and songs and perhaps some
more *bawas*. Sometimes the animals are not sacrificed until the
procession bringing the stalks of wheat, returns from the tank.

796 *Khajleniya*. This is another term for the *Jawara* festival and
refers especially to the activities of the ninth day, and the part the
women play in carrying the wheat stalks. It is therefore spoken of
[857] by some Kols as a woman's festival. Along with it there are certain
[533] activities for the children. Two sticks are set up to represent a man
[535] and a woman, and they dance about the sticks and sing some marriage
songs. There is also a test of balance, and a long bamboo pole is
[526] placed on the ground, and the boys and girls try to see if they can

775 MEETING A SPIRIT. Even though properly protected from
776 spiritual forces one is still not immune from their attacks. If one
789 should meet a spirit it is always proper to be very respectful in its
presence and to try not to offend it in any way. If the *blut* is addressed
as one would address a gentleman he may behave like one. If one
moves further on and the *blut* insists on following, the person atten-
ded may, provided he is properly protected by charms, call out the
name of Khermai three or four times in rapid succession. Her very
name is so powerful that the evil spirit is helpless and goes away
dismayed. But should the person not be properly protected by
amulets and the like, he should not call upon Khermai.

[576] If it should be necessary to pass the known dwelling place of a
blut or other spirit, the person should first stop and respectfully ask
the spirit to let him pass safely. No person should be boastful in the
presence of a spirit nor use the name of Khermai except as a last
resort. The spirit should be addressed as "Maharaj" if a male, and
if a female as "Mata". These respectful forms of address are pleasing
to them and they will allow such people to pass without harm.

789 HOW SPIRITS MAY BE CAST OUT. Evil spirits may be cast out
[791] only by those who know the secret processes and *mantras* necessary,
and such secrets are usually carefully guarded by the initiated. The
[648] *panda* is probably familiar with methods although not all of them
would admit that they were, and a member of the Baiga tribe is *par ex-*
cellence the man. The *bawa* is usually associated with this cere-
mony.

The *supa* method, forms of which are described below, is
the usual method of driving out an evil spirit. Again, the priest
while possessed of the *devi* may order the family to perform certain
rites, such as feeding the group, sacrificing at the shrine, abstaining
from rich foods, and the like; or he may even beat the unfortunate
being with his iron lash until the blood flows. This will surely frighten
the demon away.

There is another form known to the Kols by the name of *jharna*,
[924] 'the sifting or winnowing'. A *supa* (winnowing fan), a *kansiya* (sickle)
and a bit of *Kans* grass (*Saccharium spontaneum*) are made use of in
[785] this particular wave ceremony. The person on whom these will be
used must have fasted for a period and have had *mantras* pronounced
over him, then the above articles are one by one waved over him.
The sickle, the grass and the winnowing fan are all symbolical of re-
moving a spirit: the sickle, as it is first waved, symbolizes the cutting
down of the spirit, the grass implies the work is done, and in the sifting